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FRANCE ACCUSES 6 OF ROCKET SPYING

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PARIS, March 20 — The French counterintelligence service has charged two Eastern bloc nationals and four Frenchmen with trying to pass secret information on European rocket technology to a foreign country.

The six are charged with trying to gain information for an unidentified Eastern bloc country on the highly sophisticated engine used in the Ariane missile, the launching rocket of the 13-member European Space Consortium.

Those arrested, who were formally charged with espionage Wednesday, are a woman from the Soviet Union and one from Rumania, as well as their French husbands and two other French nationals.

Frederique d'Allest, the head of France's National Center of Space Studies, which oversees the European space program, said in a radio interview that the six were probably working for the Soviet Union or another Eastern European country.

The Soviet Union, in a statement from its embassy here, denied any role in such a spy ring and said it had complained to the French Government about suggestions it might have been involved. It said such suggestions were part of "a new campaign of disinformation and lies."

Few Details Given on Case

Mr. d'Allest said other countries, including India and Brazil, were interested in the rocket engines being developed in France, though he said he did not "want to suggest a false trail."

And French officials, who gave few details, did not disclose the country the group was believed to have worked for.

Industry officials said the espionage arrests were the first ever to take place in connection with the Ariane rocket program, which has specialized in launchings of commercial communications satellites from a jungle in French Guiana.

The Ariane rockets are powered by engines manufactured and tested by the European Propulsion Society at a tightly guarded plant in Vernon, near the city of Rouen in Normandy.

The rockets' propulsion system, known as cryogenic propulsion, uses liquid hydrogen and oxygen to fuel their third and final stage, which lifts the vehicle into orbit.

Mr. d'Allest said the propulsion system was "particularly difficult technologically."

China and Japan are believed to have used it in a small number of rocket launches. The Soviet Union, which is not known to have tested the technology in the past, is believed to be planning to use it in a new, large missile under development, a spokesman at the European Propulsion Society said.

The Ariane space program has suffered serious setbacks in recent months when malfunctionings in the third-stage rockets caused the failure

of two launchings. Technicians at the Vernon center are reported to be trying to redesign the rockets following the launching failures.

A spokesman at the propulsion society, Philippe Ansart, said that one of the people arrested, who was identified in the French press as Jean-Michel Haury, worked as a temporary employee with the society in Vernon but was not believed to have had access to highly sensitive information.

Officials close to the investigation, which is taking place in Rouen, said three members of the group worked at the French National Bureau of Statistics, a Government bureau.

These include two graduates of the Polytechnique engineering academy, Michel Fleury and Pierre Verdier. Mr. Verdier is the husband of one of the arrested women, Ludmila Varyguine, 31 years old, who originally came from the Soviet Union. It was unclear whether Mrs. Varyguine is a Soviet citizen or whether she had obtained French nationality.

Investigators were said to be focusing attention on the role in the group played by Antonetta Manole, a Rumanian, who also worked in Rouen in the national statistical bureau.